

MANIFESTO IN FAVOUR OF SUSPENDING THE CLOSURE OF THE NEWSPAPER "EUSKALDUNON EGUNKARIA" AND OF RESPECT FOR THE RIGHTS OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND INFORMATION OF BASQUE-SPEAKING CITIZENS.

We are in the middle of the ratification process of the "Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe". This Treaty, in its second chapter, includes the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Article 22 of which says:

Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.

The freedom and pluralism of the media shall be respected.

On 13 December 2004, the Government of Spain presented a Memorandum to the European Commission requesting recognition in the European Union of all the official languages of Spain, including Euskera (which is, along with Spanish, the co-official language in the Basque Country) and providing a copy of the Constitutional Treaty in Euskera, while at the same time making a proposal for the official recognition in the European Union of the languages other than Spanish.

In the European context, the scrupulous respect for these principles should form part of the Community heritage, and should lead to the restoration of any right infringed in the area of freedom of expression and information. That is why, through this statement, we want to express our concern to all the European institutions, starting with the European Parliament, about the closing of the newspaper Euskaldunon Egunkaria.

On 20 February 2005 two years will have passed since the closing of the Basque-language newspaper "Euskaldunon Egunkaria", the only daily publication published in this official language in the Basque Country. It is worth remembering that the Basque language is recognised as the language of Basques in Article 6 of the law regulating the powers and institutions of the Basques, the Statute of Autonomy of Gernika. Additionally, the Basic Law on the Normalisation of the Use of the Basque Language, Article 22, "recognises that all citizens have the right to be informed by the media both in Euskera and in Spanish".

The closing of the newspaper created a great deal of commotion, social concern and reaction, and even the Petition Commission of the European Parliament resolved to make a petition regarding it.

It must be said that Euskaldunon Egunkaria was a newspaper that also formed part of the European network MIDAS (European Organization of Daily Newspapers in Minority and Regional Languages), along with 28 other newspapers published in various regional languages, such as Dolomiten, Tageszeitung, Primorski (Republic of

Italy), El Periódico de Catalunya, Avui, El Punt, Diari de Balears, Segre, Regió 7, El 9 Nou, El Correo Galego, Vilaweb (Spain), Nyan Aland, Tidningen (Aland Islands), Flensborg-avis, Serbske Nowiny (Federal Republic of Germany), Hufvudsatbladet, Jakobstads Tidning, Vasabladet, Osterbottningen (Finland), La Quotidiana–Die Südostweitz (Switzerland), La Voce del Popolo (Croacia), Nordschleswiger (Denmark), Lá (Republic of Ireland), HHRF (Hungarian minority of Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, Ukrania); Ujszo (Hungarian minority, Slovakia), Szabadság (Romania). MIDAS does important work for the reinforcement of the press in the so-called minority and regional languages, forging professional and technological links among the different types of media operating in various European states.

Without detriment to the judicial steps that must be taken in this or in any other case, it is clearly noteworthy and paradoxical that the newspaper remains closed, even today, as a "precautionary measure". It is easy to see the harm caused, in a general way, to the fundamental public freedoms of expression and communication, that is, to Basque society as a whole and, with special intensity, to speakers of Euskera and, among them, the readers and subscribers of this newspaper. Also negatively affected are the newspaper's employees and collaborators, and the rights of the shareholders, and economic damage has been caused to the suppliers and creditors of the newspaper and associated companies, demonstrating that the closure affects fundamental rights.

Special mention should go to the harm caused to the persons on trial, important personalities in the world of Basque culture, who have received support and solidarity from the widest possible spectrum of political, social and institutional figures in the Basque Country.

In these times in which Europe is attempting to open new spaces for justice, prosperity, freedom and security, and in which the very text of the Treaty establishing a European Constitution emphasises the rights of citizens in a clear way, we believe it necessary to call for the reconsideration of such closure and for the restoration of the rights of the affected Basque speakers.

European Parliament

Strasbourg, 22 February 2005.

Signed:

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